



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 22 July 1999

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND; GATTON COLLEGE

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (6.14 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'Parliament' and insert—

'urges the University of Queensland, which has responsibility for Gatton College, to build upon the College's proud history of achievement.

Parliament notes however the fact that the University of Queensland Senate has not made decisions which would provide a clear direction for the future of Gatton College, thus causing uncertainty in the community.

Parliament notes that the University Senate is considering a Centre of Excellence at Gatton College, and encourages the University to give further consideration to the proposal as a means of ensuring the future viability of the Gatton Campus.

Further, this Parliament calls on the Federal Government to guarantee that the University receives appropriate funding to ensure such a vision for the College can be realised.'."

The honourable members opposite stood up and said that they wanted to be bipartisan with respect to their motion and that they wanted to achieve a consensus. Then they said all sorts of unpleasant things about the Beattie Government. They could not even stop themselves from being sarcastic in exactly the same breath as they said they wanted to be bipartisan. I will not mince words. We are not going to be bipartisan with people who approach this issue in that sort of mean-spirited way. Where do honourable members get off by saying, "I'm going to give you a kick and then you can vote with us"? Honourable members opposite are out of luck. Our amendment is framed in terms different from their motion. I will not be bipartisan; I will criticise them and their side of politics.

In the last year of the National Party Government the Gatton college had 1,850 enrolments. This year it has 2,800. That figure speaks volumes. The problem that has occurred at Gatton college is a problem which is universal in our university system, but which is particularly acute at Gatton college. The problem at Gatton college is that the increases in student numbers were not funded by the Commonwealth Government. Every university in Queensland is overenrolled in the sense that the universities have had to take on students beyond the number for which they are funded by the Commonwealth Government, because that penny-pinching economic rationalist, mean-spirited and myopic Government—

Mr Cooper: You are being nasty.

Mr WELLS: But I did not say that I was not going to be, and the honourable member did. That myopic Government has not funded universities properly. In fact, growth funding for universities in Queensland is not projected to continue far beyond the turn of the century. They have not locked it in. That is at a point when there will be an increase in the number of people in that particular age cohort. The problems for Gatton are really the problems of the entire university system, except that they are particularly acute there. This is part of the familiar pattern of unfunded places. Nevertheless, Gatton is operating well in comparison to other Australian agricultural colleges, some of which I understand are running on less than 40% capacity.

If we say that we would like the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland to flourish further, this is not to underestimate what has been achieved so far at that campus, nor is it to underestimate the possibility of what might be achieved at that campus. There has been a serious decline in demand for agricultural places and courses. The agricultural revolution did not end with the invention of the stump-jump plough. Agricultural technology has advanced enormously and continues to increase exponentially. The consequence of that is that the demand for the types of courses that have been traditionally taught at Gatton may be going down, but courses related to agriculture, particularly in business and various kinds of technology, may increase. It is essential that we should seek to lock into all of that.

At the time the Gatton college became effectively the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland, the merger itself attracted no additional Commonwealth money, places or capital support from the Commonwealth Government, which is the funding authority. However, in Queensland, despite the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government—

Mr Horan: Under the myopic, mean-spirited Labor Government that happened.

Mr WELLS: I did not say that I was going to be pleasant. Despite the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, the State Government makes a significant contribution. \$780,000 a year is provided in funding by the State Government for the Gatton college.

Time expired.
